front of the book

DITCHED?

Will White River sink the Gorge? | *By Tina Potterf*

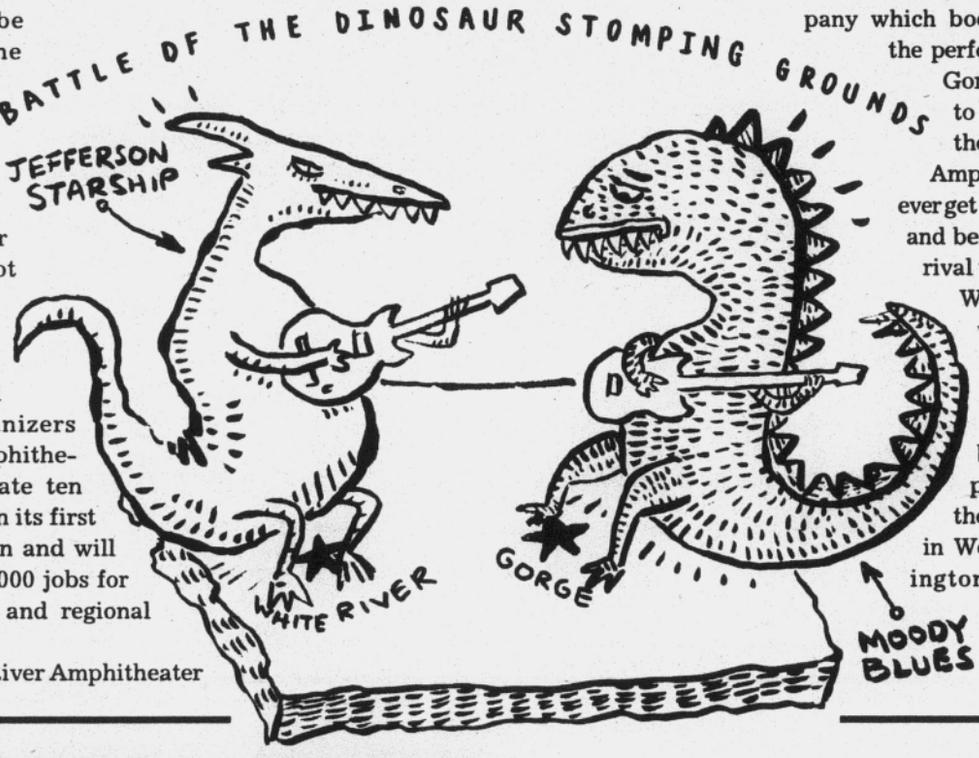
The Gorge Amphitheater, in George, WA, may soon feel the heat of viable competition in early 1998, when the White River Amphitheater opens. White River organizers promise a "first class" concert experience, complete with state-of-the-art projection screens, specialty concessions and "performers of the highest caliber." The bad news for the Gorge: White River is just 25 miles east of Seattle.

White River's 23,000 seat amphitheater will be built on the Muckleshoot Indian Reservation (midpoint between Auburn and Enumclaw). For the Muckleshoot tribe, the concert venue provides a substantial boon to the tribal economy; organizers project the amphitheater will generate ten million dollars in its first year of operation and will proffer nearly 1000 jobs for tribal members and regional residents.

"The White River Amphitheater has been a very long, extensive project involving an ongoing environmental review process," Rollin Fatland, public affairs director for the project, says. "The review is all-encompassing, looking at everything from the impact on the White River to traffic congestion and noise. It really is the only facility of its kind in its region."

"At most we're talking 45 MINUTES from Seattle."
—Rollin Fatland, White River Amphitheater

Modeled loosely after the Shoreline Amphitheater in Mountain View, California, White River will house big-name performances booked by Bill Graham Presents. Over the past few years, Bill Graham Presents has promoted acts including the Moody Blues, Tom Petty, R.E.M., Metallica, AC/DC, the Sex Pistols and the Lollapalooza and House of Blues festivals.



Jeff Trisler, vice president of Universal Concerts Northwest, the Seattle company which books/promotes the performers at the Gorge, isn't eager to concede that the White River Amphitheater will ever get off the ground and be a formidable rival to the Central Washington venue. "[For many years] there have been a number of proposed amphitheater projects in Western Washington—none of which have ever materialized," Trisler says. "I have no direct comment about any amphitheater until it's in the ground. I can't see it, touch it or taste it, and therefore can't comment."

In its 11th season, the Gorge was recently named the number one amphitheater in North America for the second consecutive year by the industry touring magazine *Pollstar*. The venue continues to establish new house attendance records, contrary to the concert industry's attendance decline in recent years.

Trisler believes that concert-goers will drive the extra distance (approximately 130 miles east of Seattle) to the Gorge because of the amenities the venue offers that other amphitheaters cannot measure up to. "We chose to develop this site because it's sunny 310 days of the year," he says. "The Gorge has the capacity and versatility to remove open [uncovered] seats for concerts, such as Lollapalooza and the H.O.R.D.E. tour. The food is as good as any amphitheater in North America. The acoustics are extraordinary. It's just lovely. Tens of thousands of people choose to come here every season."

Figuring the traffic congestion on most major thoroughfares in Western Washington, Trisler suggests that the appeal of the White River Amphitheater as a concert venue considerably closer for Puget Sounders is incidental, and not enough of an incentive for attendees to forego the pilgrimage to the Gorge. "If anyone tries to build an amphitheater in Western Washington similar to the Gorge, by the time people get ready, pack the car, get out of the driveway and then sit in freeway traffic, it'll have been about two to three hours—roughly the same amount of time it takes to get to the Gorge from Seattle," Trisler explains, adding that traffic on the rural roadways surrounding the Gorge is essentially "non-existent" and the venue is "just four miles off Interstate 90."

Fatland is equally confident that the White River Amphitheater will stand firmly on its own and establish itself as a real competitor to the Gorge. "This amphitheater isn't comparable to the Gorge, really. We have covered, theater-like seats, first-rate food service and clean, ample restrooms. At most we're talking 45 minutes from Seattle. It's entirely first class. There's no doubt that this facility will be a huge success. It's a spectacular concert venue."

Besides having a choice between two venues, what does this competition mean to NW concert-goers? The Gorge's Trisler warns, "Another amphitheater means that ticket prices will go up because the facilities will be competing for talent."◉

BELMONT'S BOOTS LIVE MUSIC

PDX music venue pulls the plug

By John Graham

The coolness of *Blade Runner* aside, it seems the future won't be manifested by monumental skyscrapers and forests of neon tubing. Instead, the suburbs are taking over the world, and their conformity is beginning to stifle art and music scenes. Witness, for example, Seattle's ban on postering. Power line worker safety? More like, "Get that ugly punk rock junk off our beautiful streets!"

This sterilizing stranglehold is threatening to land on the throat of music venues as well. Belmont's Inn, a southeast Portland club popular with prippie (preppy + hippie = prippie) groovers, was recently forced to cancel all live shows when neighbors complained of excessive noise. Though the club had been putting on shows for nine years, the Inn's Earenya Fappiano said the complaints started only a short while ago. However, they escalated with such intensity that people soon threatened "to do anything they could to close [the club] down," thus causing the cancellation of all future performances. The stage has since been torn down and has been replaced with a few pool tables.

Such events—club closings and noise complaints—occur all the time, but this particular example may be an indication of things to come. When Belmont's first opened, its surrounding neighborhood was a lower middle class, ethnically diverse, Bohemian hangout. Now, new condos have sprouted next door, a hyper-yuppie Zupan's supermarket has moved in and nearby houses are being renovated by the dozen. This suburban renewal may be leading to a more attractive street, but the gentrification process is forcing lower income residents farther out of town. Therefore, it's no surprise that the most frequent objections to Belmont's noise came during the club's Tuesday night hip-hop shows. The simple conclusion: rap scares the new neighbors.

Fappiano hesitantly agreed that "white fright" may have been a cause of the increased complaints. However, she added that the club hired extra security guards after a gunfire incident brought the police. Though no one was injured or killed in the shooting, the blame had been placed squarely on the head of Belmont's, and the neighbors decided to take action. Either the music stopped, or the Inn would be forced to close.

There are no regrets from Fappiano. "We had a good run and a lot of fun," she said. "A lot of bands got there start here and we're glad to have been there for them."◉

ART O MAT

REVOLUTION ROCK

¡Tchkung! return from El Salvador *By Ned Rust*

Following a two-week tour of El Salvador—one of Central America's most impoverished Third World republics—¡Tchkung! are back in Seattle.

The trip, undertaken with two New York-based bands, Ricanstruction and Bay of Pigs, was not just about gigs. "We did so many interviews and meetings...it was crazy," explains vocalist/violinist Devon. "It was like a political delegation as much as it was a musical thing. We went from group to group, meeting with womens' groups, talking to gang kids, mayors.... One time we did three shows in one day. It was just fucking crazy—we were so busy. I'd never felt so thoroughly like I had a good idea of a country's history and what exactly they were going through."

A glimpse at the band's scrapbook confirms that ¡Tchkung!'s activities in the Massachusetts-sized nation were wide ranging. From hooking up with local environmentalists to distributing two cases of condoms, the band didn't have much spare time. Performances, however, were not relegated to the backseat—this is ¡Tchkung! after all.

Despite a limited budget which only allowed a portion of the ¡Tchkung! collective to undertake the journey (¡Tchkung! received no direct funding from their record label, Tim/Kerr-Mercury), the group managed to put on shows of a typically intense, percussion-crazed, shamanistic nature. The band even managed to smuggle a spark-throwing machine grinder into the country.

"One time we did three shows in one day. IT WAS JUST FUCKING CRAZY."
—Devon, ¡Tchkung!

All of ¡Tchkung!'s El Salvador shows were free-of-charge, and some—like the one at the May Day/Inaugural festivities in San Salvador—were attended by upward of 10,000 people. Singer and multi-instrumentalist Rick Tahoma describes a show at the National University in San Salvador where the audience, which had been polarized between students and several hundred young gang members, fell under the group's spell.

"We took the drums out in the crowd, and we took some of the drummers from the other bands and we started a drum jam. Immediately, without any coaching at all, the gang kids started running in a big circle around the drums. They were joined by a bunch of the university students. It was this huge swirl thing [which] went on for 45 minutes."

¡Tchkung! aren't free of the geopolitical travel bug. A July trip to Cuba for the International Youth Festival and a return to El Salvador next February are in the works.◉